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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y TEXT PARA 2)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: PASOK MP VENIZELOS' TOUR D'HORIZON ON EVE OF U.S.
VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) In a cordial initial meeting, Ambassador discussed current affairs with senior opposition PASOK MP Evangelos Venizelos ranging from his upcoming visit to the U.S., the Macedonia name issue, Kosovo, education reform, and the future of PASOK. Venizelos, whose public persona is a frequently-bombastic critic of the U.S. and of the ruling New Democracy government, was an unexpectedly moderate, pragmatic and thoughtful interlocutor. End Summary.

VISIT TO U.S.

12. (C) On April 9, Ambassador Speckhard met with senior opposition PASOK MP Evangelos Venizelos who mounted a failed challenge to PASOK Chairman George Papandreou after PASOK's loss to PM Karamanlis and the New Democracy party last fall. In discussing his April 20 - May 2 trip to the U.S., Venizelos said he had been invited by the Onassis Foundation and that he would speak at Columbia's Harriman Institute and at the City University of New York. While in Washington (April 20 to 24), Venizelos would like to meet members of Congress "beyond just the Greek caucus." He specifically mentioned Senator Biden, as well as some journalists and academics, and discussed possibly meeting Acting U/S Fried, a representative from the NSC, and someone from the Pentagon in an "unofficial capacity." Venizelos also said that he had connections at Georgetown University and that he might speak there as well.

MACEDONIA

13. (C) Venizelos advocated restarting negotiations with Skopje on the name issue, saying that it was important to preserve the historical dignity of both sides and to avoid irredentism at a symbolic level. Venizelos said that he sees Vassilakis (whom he described as an old friend) as the best person on the Greek side to continue with the negotiations. On the question of continued U.S. involvement, Venizelos said the American position would be of paramount significance. He added that everyone knew the EU was powerful when it came to economic issues but that it was "without political impact" -- largely because it had no security apparatus backing it up. Venizelos said that crisis was always the best way to find solutions, and added that post-Bucharest was the best time to find a solution to the name issue. Venizelos concluded that the EU would need to accept Skopje into its membership as a price for settling the name issue. He said that he thought it very unlikely that the use of the modifier "Skopje" would be acceptable to either the government or the public after the reaction to the last Nimetz proposal using Skopje in parentheses. He saw

either 'upper' or 'northern' as being the most acceptable modifiers.

KOSOVO

14. (C) On Kosovo, Venizelos avoided the usual list of grievances with the U.S. position. Instead, he queried, "what is the American policy toward Serbia?" The U.S. needed a more elaborate Serbian strategy, according to Venizelos, because Serbia's only future was with the EU and Euro-Atlantic institutions. He said that Greece had a kind of "natural objection" to Kosovo -- which he called a protectorate without possibility -- because of "our own problems with Turkey and our Muslim minority in Thrace." He also questioned whether U.S. policy, in spite of protestation, wasn't really heading toward the concept of Greater Albania.

EDUCATION REFORM

15. (C) Venizelos insisted that Greece had no issues against serious academic institutions, but said the Greek law was designed to stop "educational fraud" by institutions without standards and without infrastructure. Venizelos said that due to Article 16 of the Greek constitution and the jurisprudence of the Greek Supreme Court, it would be extremely difficult for an American entity independently to establish itself in Greece and instead would have to align itself with a European university - or for a well-established American University to open a secondary campus in Greece or some other European city. The Ambassador urged Venizelos to look for other ways to ensure equal treatment for American-style educational institutions, as affiliations with European and Greek institutions would require changes in the fundamental nature of the American-based institutions.

PASOK FORTUNES

16. (C) Asked about the recent losses of PASOK in opinion polls, Venizelos coyly responded he was not sure why the party had slipped, but added that the role of political personalities was very important in understanding this phenomenon - an obvious dig at George Papandreou. On the possibility of a future coalition between PASOK and New Democracy, Venizelos said PASOK desperately needed to revitalize its own political ambitions and develop a new strategy for developing a new majority -- without which there can be no discussion of coalitions. Finally, he said he believed the "perpetual dilemma" between centrists and leftists within PASOK was unacceptable for a progressive majority. The citizens needed a clear message, he said, perhaps blaming PASOK's downslide on the fact that it had abandoned some of its traditionally leftist positions. As for a coalition with Synaspismos, Venizelos said he was "very hostile" to the idea of a coalition without programmatic maturation on the part of the other party.

COMMENT

17. (C) In a surprising change from his bombastic public persona, Venizelos was moderate, reasonable and pragmatic. Venizelos' questions about U.S. strategy towards Serbia -- rather than the usual diatribe about Kosovo -- presented a thoughtful approach to an issue that often evokes strong visceral reactions from Greek politicians. His questioning, however, of American support for the theory of Greater Albania means that he is not exempt from traditional regional conspiracy theorizing. Nonetheless, he was a pleasant and articulate interlocutor with whom we will seek to engage more frequently. We see it as likely that his upcoming visit to the U.S. is, at least in part, designed to shore up his foreign policy credentials as he continues to seek to undermine George Papandreou, and show himself as Prime-Ministerial. Our support for his visit should be

commensurate with that provided for any other high-ranking member of the opposition.
SPECKHARD